Hans-My-Hedgehog

Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm

Once upon a time there was a peasant who had money and land enough, but as rich as he was, there was still something missing from his happiness: He had no children with his wife. Often when he went to the city with the other peasants, they would mock him and ask him why he had no children. He finally became angry, and when he returned home, he said, "I will have a child, even if it is a hedgehog."

Then his wife had a baby, and the top half was a hedgehog and the bottom half a boy. When she saw the baby, she was horrified and said, "Now see what you have wished upon us!"

The man said, "It cannot be helped. The boy must be baptized, but we cannot ask anyone to be his godfather."

The woman said, "And the only name that we can give him is Hans-My-Hedgehog."

When he was baptized, the pastor said, "Because of his quills he cannot be given an ordinary bed." So they put a little straw behind the stove and laid him in it. And he could not drink from his mother, for he would have stuck her with his quills. He lay there behind the stove for eight years, and his father grew tired of him, and thought, "if only he would die." But he did not die, but just lay there.

Now it happened that there was a fair in the city, and the peasant wanted to go. He asked his wife what he should bring her.

"A little meat, some bread rolls, and things for the household," she said. Then he asked the servant girl, and she wanted a pair of slippers and some fancy stockings.

Finally, he also said, "Hans-My-Hedgehog, what would you like?"

"Father," he said, "bring me some bagpipes."

When the peasant returned home he gave his wife what he had brought for her, meat and bread rolls. Then he gave the servant girl the slippers and fancy stockings. And finally he went behind the stove and gave Hans-My-Hedgehog the bagpipes.

When Hans-My-Hedgehog had them, he said, "Father, go to the blacksmith's and have my cock-rooster shod, then I will ride away and never again come back." The father was happy to get rid of him, so he had his rooster shod, and when it was done, Hans-My-Hedgehog climbed on it and rode away. He took pigs and donkeys with him, to tend in the forest.

In the forest the rooster flew into a tall tree with him. There he sat and watched over the donkeys and the pigs. He sat there for years, until finally the herd had grown large. His father knew nothing about him. While sitting in the tree, he played his bagpipes and made beautiful music.

One day a king came by. He was lost and heard the music. He was amazed to hear it, and sent a servant to look around and see where it was coming from. He looked here and there but only saw a little animal sitting high in a tree. It looked like a rooster up there with a hedgehog sitting on it making the music.

The king said to the servant that he should ask him why he was sitting there, and if he knew the way back to his kingdom. Then Hans-My-Hedgehog climbed down from the tree and told him that he would show him the way if the king would promise in writing to give him the first thing that greeted him at the royal court upon his arrival home.

The king thought, "I can do that easily enough. Hans-My-Hedgehog cannot understand writing, and I can put down what I want to."

Then the king took pen and ink and wrote something, and after he had done so, Hans-My-Hedgehog showed him the way, and he arrived safely at home. His daughter saw him coming from afar, and was so overjoyed that she ran to meet him and kissed him. He thought about Hans-My-Hedgehog and told her what had happened, that he was supposed to have promised the first thing that greeted him to a strange animal that rode a rooster and made beautiful music. But instead he had written that this would not happen, for Hans-My-Hedgehog could not read. The princess was happy about this, and said that it was a good thing, for she would not have gone with him in any event.

Hans-My-Hedgehog tended the donkeys and pigs, was of good cheer, and sat in the tree blowing on his bagpipes.

Now it happened that another king came this way with his servants and messengers. He too got lost and did not know the way back home because the forest was so large. He too heard the beautiful music from afar, and asked one of his messengers to go and see what it was and where it was coming from. The messenger ran to the tree where he saw Hans-My-Hedgehog astride the cock-rooster. The messenger asked him what he was doing up there.

"I am tending my donkeys and pigs. What is it that you want?" replied Hans-My-Hedgehog.

The messenger said that they were lost and could not find their way back to their kingdom, and asked him if he could not show them the way.

Then Hans-My-Hedgehog climbed down from the tree with his rooster and told the old king that he would show him the way if he would give him the thing that he first met at home before the royal castle.

The king said yes and signed a promise to Hans-My-Hedgehog.

When that was done, Hans-My-Hedgehog rode ahead on his rooster showing them the way, and the king safely reached his kingdom. When the king arrived at his court there was great joy. Now he had an only daughter who was very beautiful. She ran out to him, threw her arms around his neck and kissed him, and was ever so happy that her old father had returned.

She asked him where he had been during his long absence, and he told her how he had lost his way and almost not made it home again, but that as he was making his way through a great forest he had come upon a half hedgehog, half human astride a rooster sitting in a tall tree and making beautiful music who had shown him the way, but whom he had promised whatever first met him at the royal court, and it was she herself, and he was terribly sorry.

But she promised that she would go with him when he came, for the love of her old father.

Hans-My-Hedgehog tended his pigs, and the pigs had more pigs, until there were so many that the whole forest was full. Then Hans-My-Hedgehog let his father know that they should empty out all the stalls in the village, because he was coming with such a large herd of pigs that everyone who wanted to would be able to take part in the slaughter.

It saddened the father to hear this, for he thought that Hans-My-Hedgehog had long since died. But Hans-My-Hedgehog mounted his cock-rooster, drove the pigs ahead of himself into the village, and had them butchered. What a slaughter What a commotion! They could hear the noise two hours away!

Afterward Hans-My-Hedgehog said, "Father, have my cock-rooster shod a second time at the blacksmith's. Then I will ride away and not come back again as long as I live." So the father had the cock-rooster shod, and was happy that Hans-My-Hedgehog was not coming back.

Hans-My-Hedgehog rode into the first kingdom. The king had ordered that if anyone should approach who was carrying bagpipes and riding on a rooster, that he should be shot at, struck down, and stabbed, to prevent him from entering the castle. Thus when Hans-My-Hedgehog rode up, they attacked him with bayonets, but he spurred his rooster on, flew over the gate and up to the king's window. Landing there, he shouted to him, to give him what he had promised, or it would cost him and his daughter their lives.

Then the king told the princess to go out to him, in order to save his life and her own as well. She put on a white dress, and her father gave her a carriage with six horses, magnificent servants, money, and property. She climbed aboard and Hans-My-Hedgehog took his place beside her with his rooster and bagpipes. They said farewell and drove off.

The king thought that he would never see them again. However, it did not go as he thought it would, for when they had traveled a short distance from the city, Hans-My-Hedgehog pulled off her beautiful clothes and stuck her with his quills until she was bloody all over. "This is the reward for your deceit. Go away. I do not want you." With that he sent her back home, and she was cursed as long as she lived.

Hans-My-Hedgehog, astride his cock-rooster and carrying his bagpipes, rode on to the second kingdom where he had also helped the king find his way. This one, in contrast, had ordered that if anyone looking like Hans-My-Hedgehog should arrive, he should be saluted and brought to the royal castle with honors and with a military escort.

When the princess saw him she was horrified, because he looked so strange, but she thought that nothing could be done about it, because she had promised her father to go with him. She welcomed Hans-My-Hedgehog, and they were married. Then he was taken to the royal table, and she sat next to him while they ate and drank.

That evening when it was time to go to bed, she was afraid of his quills, but he told her to have no fear, for he would not hurt her. He told the old king to have four men keep watch by their bedroom door. They should make a large fire. He said that he would take off his hedgehog skin after going into the bedroom, and before getting into bed. The men should immediately pick it up and throw it into the fire, and then stay there until it was completely consumed by the fire.

When the clock struck eleven, he went into the bedroom, took off the hedgehog skin, and laid it down by the bed. The men rushed in, grabbed it, and threw it into the fire, and as soon as the fire consumed it, he was redeemed, and he lay there in bed entirely in the shape of a human. But he was as black as coal, as though he had been charred. The king sent for his physician, who washed him with good salves and balms. Then he became white and was a handsome young gentleman.

When the princess saw what had happened, she was overjoyed, and they got up and ate and drank. Now their wedding was celebrated for real, and Hans-My-Hedgehog inherited the old king's kingdom.

Some years later he traveled with his wife to his father, and said that he was his son. But the father said that he did not have a son. He had had one, but he had been born with quills like a hedgehog and had gone off into the world. Then he said that he was the one, and the old father rejoiced and returned with him to his kingdom.

My tale is done,
And has gone
To Gustchen's home.

- Source: Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, "Hans mein Igel," *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* [Children's and Household Tales -- Grimms' Fairy Tales], 7th ed., vol. 2 (Göttingen: Verlag der Dieterichschen Buchhandlung, 1857), no. 108, pp. 114-19.
- The Grimms' source: Dorothea Viehmann (1755-1815). The Grimms first published this tale in 1815 in volume 2 (no. 22) of their *Kinder- und Hausmärchen.* From the second edition onward it was given number 108.
- Translated by D. L. Ashliman. © 2000.
- Aarne-Thompson-Uther type 441.
- The Grimms made only a few revisions (mostly stylistic) to this tale between the first and the last editions. Two changes worth noting are:
    1. In the first and second editions, before punishing the first princess by pricking her with his quills, "he undressed her." In the final (7th) edition, "he pulled off her clothes." Because I do not have access to editions 3-6, I cannot ascertain exactly when this change was made.
    2. In the first edition, Hans-My-Hedgehog goes to bed with the second princess before there is any mention of marriage. In the second and following editions, the Grimms added the phrase "and they were married" before sending the couple off to bed.

Links to related sites

- Hog Bridegrooms, additional tales of type 441, in which heroines are forced to marry hogs or hedgehogs.
- The Grimm Brothers' Children's and Household Tales (Grimms' Fairy Tales).
- The Grimm Brothers' Home Page.
- D. L. Ashliman's **folktexts**, a library of folktales, folklore, fairy tales, and mythology.

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